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Resisting Biopolitics through “Diaphanous Wonder”: Richard Flanagan's *Gould's Book of Fish* (2003)

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Abstract:

In *Gould's Book of Fish* (2003), author Richard Flanagan manages to invent a format in which content and style account for historical events on Sarah Island, Tasmania in the 1820s, yet he does so in a manner that is not in the least objective, disinterested or fact-orientated. The perspective of *Gould's Book of Fish's* (Flanagan, 2003) first-person narrator is highly subjective, usually unreliable and always less than truthful. Flanagan (2003) thereby shows that literature can provide a form of knowledge that differs from historical truth, but without being its dialectical opposite. Literature can construct a non-referential narrative space in which experiences unfold that hardly unimaginable. Literature can show the urge and desire to understand historical events that are terrible to relate to. It can invent a story that can account for the consequences of a violent colonial system. Yet, above all, the novel stresses a desire to render stories of unspeakable horrors through what can be call the “becoming-fish” of its first-person narrator. This desire expresses a hyperbolic love of each and everyone, one which extends so far as to even include all the other wonders of this world in its account too. By depicting convicts and natives as loving and lovable persons, author Richard Flanagan (2003) refrains from reducing them to the colonial conditions in which they were caught up. He thereby offers a point of view that differs from Giorgio Agamben's (1998) highly influential account of “bare life.” I will take this perspective, in which life and its conditions cannot be lumped together, as a point of departure from which to criticise Agamben's (1998) transhistorical and transnational account of biopolitical determinations of life.

[**Key words:** Richard Flanagan, *Gould's Book of Fish*, Tasmania, colonization, convict-system, Agamben, bare life, aesthetics, resistance]

Gould's Book of Fish, a novel by Tasmanian author Richard Flanagan (2003), is set during the early days of Britain's colonisation of Tasmania in the 1820s and used the unreliable narrative voice of inmate William Buelow Gould, a prisoner who lived in the institution from 1829-33. Though based on documented historical occurrences and persons, the narrative relies heavily on metafictional devices to comment on its own constructed nature and uses the voice of the main character to express a distinct view of historical events. Specifically, the first-person narrative voice of the protagonist is used to portray historical events in a distorted and idiosyncratic manner, speaking to and reflecting the distortions and biopolitical control imposed upon on people by brutal and genocidal colonial systems, as occurred in Tasmania, and where the experiences of those under that brutality have been silenced. This novel manifests the fundamental need to tell the story that has been untold or silenced. In the novel this need is manifested in Gould's desire to tell the story of a fish – an animal that is, by human standards, voiceless.

The novel's narrator undergoes significant perspective transformations which allow him to be affected by a hyperbolic, generalized love for everyone and everything in the whole world, which can be identified with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of "becomings". These becomings are important to analyse because the love that they bring about is not only central to the novel's vision of life, it also is central to the important shift of perspective presented by the novel. This love will also be the counterpoint for examining Agamben's (1998) highly influential notion of 'bare life,' which was introduced and expounded upon in his work *Homo Sacer*.

1. Literary Style versus Biopolitical Capture

Gould's Book of Fish (Flanagan, 2003) is set in the first prison settlement in Tasmania, the Macquarie Harbour Penal Station, built in 1822 on a small island in the Macquarie Harbour on Tasmania's west coast. Sarah Island, a place of extremely harsh geographic and social conditions (see Maxwell-Steward, 2008), was quickly regarded as one of the harshest locations in the English-speaking world (Hughes, 1987, p. 372). Convicts were worked for twelve to sixteen hours daily, with inadequate food or housing, and corporal punishment was not uncommon (Hughes, 1987). Prison records report 33,723 lashes during public floggings between 1822 and 1826 (Hughes 1987, p. 377). Just as *Gould's Book of Fish* describes the conditions in the Macquarie Harbour Penal Station as they appear according to historical records, the first-person narrator is superimposed onto the convict-painter William Buelow Gould (1801-53), imprisoned for forgery, who has been historically recognized for his superb naturalistic paintings of the area's flora and fauna (see Allport, 1931; Clune and Stephensen, 1962; Pretyman, 1970). In both the novel and historical record, the protagonist was assigned to assist the colonial surgeon Dr James Scott on Sarah Island, who commissioned him to paint the depictions of local fish, plants, and birds for which he is now known. The novel *Gould's Book of Fish* (Flanagan, 2003) takes the form of the convict-painter's journal, and though fictional, the fish-drawings included in the book are those of Gould, used with permission, and are said to have been painted from memory. The novel weaves a fictitious and embellished storyline based on Gould's prison time through historical information based on known persons and events on Sarah Island during that time.

Though based on historical events and characters, the use of a non-linear chronology and frequently interrupted storyline, metafictional literary devices, and fantastic and parodic interventions avoids any positivistic renderings of history, and allows the novel, according to various critics, to counter enlightenment thought's teleological narrative of the "progress of civilization" (see Bogue, 2010; Jones, 2008; Shipway, 2003; Weir, 2005). Gould's narration depicts the traumatic events transpiring in the Tasmanian penal colony (and in the story itself) through a distorted lens, in this way reflecting the distortions imposed upon people by the brutal and genocidal colonial system in Tasmania, but also testifies to the capacity of people, even under those circumstances, to maintain affective relationships. I will argue that with this novel, Flanagan (2003) shows us how literature can be used as a space to examine (un)imaginable experiences, to aid in

comprehending historical events so horrible as to seem incomprehensible, and to address the need for the expression of silent and silenced voices. In *Gould's Book of Fish*, Gould's longing to tell the story of the (voiceless) fish manifests this desire, through a process which is inherently tied to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming. I will contrast Flanagan's use of literary, stylistic and narrative devices to create an empowering depiction of convicts and indigenous persons in *Gould's Book of Fish*, with Agamben's failure, in *Homo Sacer* (1998), to similarly invest in the creation of an analysis in which human beings are *not* dehumanized.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987), in their concept of becoming, have drawn from ideas of Spinoza, especially the importance he places on the composition of relations and encounters, and the effects of those encounters, rather than on the essential traits of a being. Human beings' understanding of the encounters with external ideas or entities tends to be limited to how the encounter is affecting us: “only our body in its own relation, and our mind in its own relation” (Spinoza qtd. in Deleuze, 1988, p. 19). However, if we are able to go beyond this initial reaction, our minds and bodies, and the bodies and minds of others, are capable of surpassing “the consciousness that we have of it” (Deleuze, 1988, p.19). Though becoming lacks a form through which it can convey its meaning, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 253) understand it as an interplay of specific, unique moments, happenings, intensities and affectivities. Becoming, therefore, is a process that expresses the capacity of life to go beyond meaning and to create a formulation for the potentiality of joy and possibly even a “love of the whole world” (Lawlor, 2008, p. 173).

In the following analysis I focus on Gould's becoming-fish, which through its hyperbolic affect of love provides readers with one most consequential and fundamental perspective shifts: that the understanding of a life cannot be limited to an understanding of its circumstances, its suffering, or the brutality imposed upon it, because it has its own subjectivities beyond those bounds that are able to create more and different relations, desires, and action. This understanding of life will be the counterpoint upon which I base my criticism of Agamben's (1998) transhistorical and transnational analysis of the biopolitical determinations of life in *Homo Sacer*. I will show how Flanagan's sets out a vision in which the lives of those historically silenced, subjugated and colonized are given value, character and humanity, and how this vision might guide readers towards the creation of an accountability with the past and a responsibility to the future.

2. An Escape by Means of Becoming

In *Gould's Book of Fish*, the narrator experiences the generation of a hyperbolic love towards each and every person and creature, evoked by his encounter with the fish he has been assigned to paint:

The fish were at the beginning only a job, but to do that job well & keep the undoubted benefits that flowed from it, I had to learn about them. I had to study the manner in which fins passed from the realm of opaque flesh to diaphanous

wonder, the sprung firmness of bodies, the way mouths related to oversized heads, heads to expanding bodies, the way scale dewlapped with scale to create a dancing sheen. (...) And I would have to admit that all this painting & repainting began to affect me. (Flanagan, 2003, p. 213-14)

Although Gould had originally been ordered to paint the fish in order to facilitate their scientific classification, his first encounter with one of his subjects, the kelpy, triggers a series associations, memories, and stories, sparked by a feeling of wonder before the creature. Deleuze and Guattari's "zones of intensity and proximity" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 274) here come out of the artistic attention by Gould to the fish's unique characteristics and its remarkable change "from the realm of opaque flesh to diaphanous wonder" (Flanagan, 2003, p. 213) capable of inspiring affect. The sort of attention required by Gould for this painting opened the way to experience the fish before him not only as a determined collection of physical features but as a wondrous subject inspiring an awe that allowed for a broadening of perception, as he was mesmerized by "the sprung firmness of bodies (...) the way scale dewlapped with scale to create a dancing sheen" (p. 213). Rather than simply recording a series of characteristics of the subjects of his paintings, his art form (painting) requires him "to learn about them" (p. 213), through close observation, trying to understand them, their lives, thoughts and circumstances, as well as the wonder of their existence, and therefore represents an entirely different process to that of merely representing. Deleuze (2000) defines this type of learning as being

essentially concerned with signs. (...) To learn is first of all to consider a substance, an object, a being as it emitted signs to be deciphered, interpreted. (...) Everything that teaches us something emits signs; every act of learning is an interpretation of signs or hieroglyphs. (Deleuze, 2000, p. 4)

In the act of painting (a fish), one must undergo an apprenticeship of their signs, according to Deleuze (2000), signs which must be manifested into an image that surpasses habitual recognition (p. 4). Habit and recognition are perceptory filters, selectively and passively interpreting what a subject encounters, in a sort of contemplation-contraction. In order to get beyond the confines of habit and recognition, it is necessary to *undo* processes of selection and choice, so that the binding of habit and recognition can also become *undone*.

Gould's encounter with the fish sparks his "undoing" of habit and recognition thereby widening his perception of the object. Rather than seeing the fish as merely an object to be visually transposed for classification, he is affected by the fish in a profound way that escapes the confines of those two contemplation-contractions. Through the process of undoing habit and recognition, Gould is able to experience the fish as embodying the wonder of life, a sensation he is impelled to transmit through his paintings. He steps beyond his assignment to merely archive the fish for natural history by including his own perceptions, interpretations, and formation intrinsically and stylistically in his paintings of the fish, to create a space of interaction of meaning with both them and the viewer. Gould's proximity to the fish brings about an unavoidable and overpowering affect,

through which he allows himself to be overcome by the presence of these extraordinary creatures. If he is to be true to the affect that has possessed him, he is compelled to transmit their dynamic beauty in his paintings. Affected by his encounter with these marvelous beings, Gould is pushed outside of the bounds of body and self to become multiplicity. Gould describes this occurrence as feeling the fish's soul crossing over into his, an event which Gould is unable to detain:

Perhaps because I spent so long with them, because I had to try to know something of them, they began to interest me, & then to anger me, which was worse, because they were beginning to enter me & I didn't even know that they were colonising me as surely as Lieutenant Bowen had colonised Van Diemen's Land all those years ago. (...) It was as if it was not possible to spend so long in the company of fish without something of their cold eye & quivering flesh passing across the air into your soul. (Flanagan, 2003, p. 214)

Gould feels the fish want “to avoid being consigned to some nether world of lost shapes” (Flanagan, 2003, p. 215), to be faithfully recorded through the act of painting, which, while not allowing them to live longer, will at least record their lives and evidence their existence.

However, Gould's growing obsession with the fish and their subsequent possession of him go beyond an exercise in painterly technique. The relation between Gould and the fish goes beyond the subject-object artistic relation, and Gould and the fish become forged into a single entity. Gould describes the occurrence as “[the forging of] fish & me into one forever” (Flanagan, 2003, p. 215), which goes beyond the technical approach of Audubon, the famed naturalist painter of “The Birds of America” (1826-1836), with whom Gould apprenticed. Audubon's painting, according to Gould, aims to bring out the birds' “essential humours” (Flanagan, 2003, p. 62), highlighting their pride, their idiocy or their madness in their singular representation. In order to “distill in a single image the story of a whole life” (p. 62), there must be a story. However, the stories distilled into Audubon's paintings do not reflect those of the birds themselves, but stories that originate “in the new American towns & cities (...) in the dreams & hopes of those around him” (p. 63). Projected upon Audubon's birds is “a natural history of the new burghers” (p. 63), whose stories can be seen reflected in the birds' images.

Gould's painterly perspective, on the other hand, does not recreate the story being told of civilization:

Audubon painted the dreams of a new country (...) my fish are the nightmares of the past for which there is no market. (...) It is a natural history of the dead. (Flanagan, 2003, p. 63)

While Audubon projects the “natural history of the new burghers” onto the forms of the birds he paints, Gould's disturbing perspective positions both him and his fish in “the true condition of this life: alone, fearful, with no home, nowhere to run and hide” (Flanagan, 2003, p. 63). It is clear that the narrative of progress, improvement, and transcendence are

not found in Gould's perspective. As Jo Jones (2008) has illustrated, the novel opposes the Enlightenment historical vision, countering its narrative of a humanity that is constantly learning from itself on its path toward a better future (p. 115-116).

Gould's Book of Fish speaks to a particular life wrought with fear, homelessness, and death. It is a life that is bound by spatial and temporal situatedness, yet one that simultaneously is radically interconnected, populated, colonised and invaded by its encounters. One can see this through Gould's description of the strange and violent process by which the fish take him over:

They were boring into me, seeping through my pores by some dreadful osmosis. And when within me glimmered the unexpected, somewhat terrifying knowledge that they were taking possession of my daytime thoughts, my night-time dreams, I grew frightened & longed to repel them, to fight back as the blackfellas had. (Flanagan, 2003, p. 214)

This description clearly shows becoming as a painful transmutation, rather than an idyllic freeing of oneself from selfish interests or desires. At the same time, Gould is being acted upon by the violence of the colonial system, in which actors such as the surgeon Lempriere have the power over Gould, and, if resisted, can make the conditions of his imprisonment worse. As Lempriere's servant and under the affective power of becoming, Gould finds himself in a desperate situation in which his capacity to relate to the world and to feel an interconnectedness with all creatures is confronted with the violence of the colonialist system and its consequences.

The fish affect Gould to the extent that he feels, primarily becoming-fish, eventually entering a state in which he does not distinguish safety and death from each other. Simultaneously, the fish are also enveloped in a becoming, as becoming-painting, which entails multitudes of possible effects, and new constellations between fish, painter, and viewers. Though the inevitable conclusion of both of these becomings involves certain sorts of deaths, the trajectory between the fish and Gould causes an affect that makes Gould "capable of loving" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 197; p. 199-200). In this case, love, the personal feeling, is displaced by a love that draws one beyond the territories within which the self resides. This love is "an exercise in depersonalization" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 2), moving beyond individual and singular realities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 2), into being of, one with, and composing multiplicities. By moving beyond known contexts and relations, this type of love is continually abolishing the boundaries of self, such that there is no longer a separation of self from other, allowing the self to become everybody and the entire world. In *Gould's Book of Fish*, this movement beyond the borders of the self is first observed in Gould's increasing obsession with the fish:

... because of my newfound proximity to what hitherto had been little more than stench wrapped in slime & scale, I began to dream that there was nothing in the extraordinary universe opening in front of me, not a man or woman, not a bird or

fish, to which I might be allowed to continue remaining indifferent. (Flanagan, 2003, p. 258)

The first affect produced by becoming is that it is no longer possible to be “indifferent” (Flanagan, 2003, p. 258) to anyone, allowing one’s perception to open up to an “extraordinary universe” (Flanagan, 2003, p. 258). The work of Agamben, highly influential in contemporary philosophical and political debates, offers a starkly different perspective. In *Homo Sacer* (1998), he argues that throughout history, life has been differentiated between its political form (bios) and its “merely” biological form (zoë), the political sphere becoming the exclusive territory of bios. I argue *Gould's Book of Fish* (Flanagan, 2003) intends to forge a vision of life that does not distinguish between biology and political capacity.

Gould’s capacity to be affected is further enhanced when Gould's lover, Twopenny Sal visits him in his cell. Gould is overtaken by a delirious, affected state dissolves the borders between Self and Other, and Heaven and Earth, grasping the sacredness imbued in every point in universe:

How I wished to essay the universe I loved which was me also & how I wanted to know why it was that in my dreams I flew through oceans & why when I awoke I was the earth smelling of freshly turned peat. No man could answer me my angry lamentations nor could they hear my jokes why I had to suffer this life. I was God & I was pus & whatever was me was You & You were Holy, Your feet, Your bowels, Your mound, Your armpits, Your smell & Your sound and taste, Your fallen Beauty, I was Divine in Your image & I was You & I was no longer long for this grand earth & why is it no words would tell how I was so much hurting aching bidding farewell? (Flanagan, 2003, p.262)

He dissolves himself into a feverous stream of words and ideas, intoning a hymn to the world of sounds, sensations, bodies, tastes, in which Self and Other intertwine and fuse, with each other and the world. Gould’s 'aching bidding farewell' (Flanagan, 2003, p. 262) reflects his love for the world, which he embodies and though in it he encounters pain, treason, torture and death, he encounters wonder as well, and is able to embrace and love the whole of it.

3. Beyond the Netherworld of Lost Shades

Deleuze and Guattari argue that literature creates spaces beyond individual experiences and recognition that are unresponsive to “the ontophenomenological demand of Western politics” (Spinks, 2001, p. 33). Though literature displays neither “being” nor “experience,” it can create spaces surpassing being and experience by using a constellation of signs stripped of their referential functions, as they exist outside the known universe. Readers must learn to navigate the constellation of signs laid out in the universe created by the literary work, which are not bound to temporal or physical laws but rather by the possibilities of literary expression. In this way, literature allows readers to escape the

confines of physical and temporal laws, go beyond “the facility of recognition” (Deleuze, 2000, p. 27) and step outside the prescribed ideas, signs and judgements that hinder our capacity to discover the unknown, the new, or the unaccounted for. If we remain bound within the cycle of memory and recognition,

[w]e recognize things, but we never know them. What the sign signifies we identify with the person or object it designates. We miss our finest encounters, we avoid the imperatives that emanate from them: to the exploration of encounters we have preferred the facility of recognition. (Deleuze, 2000, p. 27)

Through the literary possibility to create intemporal and unworldly systems of signs, and relations, it allows for the creation of micropolitical constellations in which the politico-discursive power-relations could be shifted or addressed. As Lee Spinks points out, Foucault's (1978, 1994) concept of biopower has identified the regulation of life as the location of the key exercise of power in modern Western nation-states. Along with Massumi and Deleuze, Spinks further asserts that modern power operates through procedures that go beyond the simple regulation of knowledge: images and affects in fact 'compose an investment in 'man" (Spinks, 2001, p. 24). He therefore asks:

If the meaning of social and political codes originates in the stylistic or affective production of a border between human and inhuman 'life', to what extent can art and literature help us to rethink the nature of the political limit insofar as the question of style lies at the heart of every aesthetic determination? (Spinks, 2001, p. 24)

To answer this question, Spinks (2001) looks to the analysis of literature provided in Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1972), and points out that in literature, 'thought cannot be confined to the perspective of a speaking subject or enclosed within the domain of signification' (p. 31). According to Spinks' (2001) reading of Foucault, literature creates a space to show how human beings do not have “a privileged position as the origin of truth and value” (p. 32), because language as used in literature can lack or distort meaning. In this way, meaning is a variable, rather than a given, and can break down. This precarious uncertainty of meaning points to its constructed nature, and indeed the construction of the meaning of being human. Spinks (2001) further argues that literature provides a model that can deviate from biopolitically inflected modernity, in which “ontology and politics (...) remain irreducible to the biopolitical horizon” (p. 32), since it is not bound to any reality. As such, it can also provide a perspective from which to examine the constructed nature of reality.

In the following analysis, I will argue that the capacity of literature to work outside of biopolitical encapsulations of life contrasts Giorgio Agamben's (1998, 1999, 2000) arguments on biopolitics which have become influential in debates on biopolitics. Here I will focus specifically on *Homo Sacer* (Agamben 1998), the essay in which Agamben's vision of biopolitics has been most elaborated upon. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben (1998) draws from work of Michel Foucault (1978, 1994), Hannah Arendt (1963, 1979, 1994), and

Carl Schmitt (1922, 1933, 1974) concerning the relation between life and politics. In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben (1998) argues that since antiquity, Western societies have distinguished political life (bios) from natural – or 'bare' – life (zoë), and that the latter has historically been excluded from the political domain. Since the development of the modern nation state, 'bare life' (zoë) has in fact become the primary biopolitical object of bios, in a sort of 'excluded inclusion' (Agamben, 1998, p. 7). Birth circumstance, rather than political engagement and capacity, determines one's relation to a state and one's relationship to the state's management, control and use of (bare) life. The idea that these lives are separate and confined to different spheres provides a framework and a form of deciding 'which life ceases to be politically relevant' (1998, p.139) and is therefore 'sacred life' – a life that can be taken without it being considered a criminal act (p. 71-119). Considering a life is “not worthy of living,” is “socially dead,” and that this life can be taken without punishment, marks an exception for the judicial order. One can see, with the establishment of the German National Socialist state in 1933, how the state of exception becomes a “new and stable spatial arrangement inhabited by the bare life” (p. 175), such that the exception becomes normalized in a determined space and time. For Agamben, the (concentration) camp is illustrative of “the political space of modernity itself” (p. 174), where this state of exception is most visibly spacialized, rather than temporalized. Here, the connection between power and bare is revealed, where modern nation states' exercise of power is largely biopolitical. In normalizing the exception to the rule, biopolitics can always become necropolitics. With the modern state taking control of, and claiming the use of “bare life,” it creates a division between that life which is then under that care/control and that which is considered worthy of agency in the political sphere. Such a hierarchy of value and determination given to these categorized lives could create such a division in which lives are so unvalued that they may be taken without consequences.

There have been various critiques of Agamben's analysis of modernity's biopolitical legacy. Theorists like Rancière (2004), Žižek (2014), Whyte (2009), and Ziarek (2008) critique Agamben's (1998) tendency to generalize across various historical situations and among different historical actors. They question his historical accuracy, and his tendency toward overgeneralizing and overreaching analysis, and his failure to take into account the exceptions to the rule. They also question his definitions of what constitutes a political action. I share these concerns and argue that it is politically and philosophically imperative to recognize and analyse the exceptions to the rule and to specify the variations in nexus between sovereignty and biopolitical determinations over time, place and population group. However, drawing from Spink's aforementioned suggestions, I argue that in *Homo Sacer*, Agamben (1998) does not invest stylistically and affectively in a humanizing representation of the lives spoken about in his work. Ziarek (2008) shows that Agamben “never considers potentiality from the perspective of bare life – that is, from the perspective of the impossible” (p. 97). Her arguments are based on Patterson's (1982) analysis of slavery and social death. Although she sees slavery as fitting into the idea of *Homo Sacer*, in which enslaved persons were excluded from the political sphere and exposed to a form of violence which, in that temporal and special context was not defined as criminal, she importantly asserts Patterson's assertion that in conditions of slavery,

people have always struggled for freedom (p. 342). Ziarek (2008) stresses that Patterson's 'insistence on the ongoing struggle for liberation by dominated people points to another legacy of modernity that Agamben sidesteps: the legacy of revolutionary and emancipatory movements' (p. 98). Ziarek (2008) argues that Agamben's (1998) excessive focus on the sovereignty (bios) end of the power-relation creates an omission of realms of transformative power, defined as

the negation of existing exclusions from the political followed by the unpredictable and open-ended process of creating new forms of collective life. (Ziarek, 2008, p. 98)

In the understanding of literature inspired by Deleuze and Guattari and put forth in this article, literature has a transformative power to create "new forms of collective life" (Ziarek, 2008, p. 98). It creates a space in which "bare life" can be invested with a narrative perspective that might otherwise be lost, since dominant historiographical narratives only give voice to those included in the political sphere. As such, it creates a space in which historical exclusions can be challenged and in which unheard voices can address us from the past. As Chris Pak (Oct 6, 2008, n.p.) argues in *The Reader Online*, Flanagan creates an "alternate picture of history and therefore of the present. He does so to give voice to a type of truth suppressed from the historical record." In *Gould's Book of Fish* (Flanagan 2003), the convict-painter William Buelow Gould's narrative voice is an invented, fictitious voice that aims to counter the suppression of the voices of the dispossessed – in Tasmania, the Aborigines and the lumpenproletarian prisoners – from the historical record. The voice forged by the narrator personifies a life that manages to escape a dehumanizing colonial prison system by allowing itself to open its heart, mind, and perception to take in the totality of life of the creatures it paints. The various stories in *Gould's Book of Fish* show us that that lives are more than the sum of their actions, more than the set of circumstances in which their stories unfold, and more than the violence under which they are lived. Allowing Gould the capacity to be affected with love for the fish he is painting until he enters into a state in which he no longer feels a separation from them, is an intention to counter the historical effects of the violence and exclusion that the colonial system exercised upon indigenous persons and prisoners. Flanagan (2003), by giving these 'bare lives' their own perspective, gives an (albeit fictitious) voice to those excluded from historical accounts, and though this perspective is a forgery, it is one that addresses the excluded voices and experiences. In this way, the novel uses a 'false' vision of life in order to avoid repeating the dehumanization exercised historically and discursively, and adheres to Ziarek's (2008) claim that potentiality must not be seen as only residing on sovereignty's side of power. In this way, *Gould's Book of Fish* (Flanagan, 2003) opens a space to reclaim voices in history that, although living under conditions of violence and historically silenced, are able to exhibit a love for life, and whose love for life evidences a resistance to their exclusion, as *Homo Sacer* (Agamben, 1998) from the political realm.

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